

DAVID LANT AND HARRY TRACY  
An Experience involving Walt McCoy

*Written by George Long*

I have had several interesting conversations with the late Cliff McCoy, and the following is one which we had on January 30, 1986. It was at this time that he told me about his father, Walt McCoy's, experience concerning Dave Lant and Harry Tracy on Diamond Mountain.

Walt McCoy had come to this country and herded sheep for Readers from which he built up a herd of his own and went into the business himself. He had previously worked as a cowboy on some of the big cattle drives coming up out of Texas into Kansas and Colorado. He eventually came to Ashley Valley and liking it, stayed here. He had acquired range on Diamond Mountain and soon became well acquainted with this area and over into Brown's Park. No doubt about it a good interesting story could be told about this man, but these few words relate to McCoy's experience with Dave Lant and his notorious side kick, Harry Tracy, in the fall of 1897.

Dave Lant was a native of Utah and had come to Vernal in the mid eighteen nineties at which time he met Walt McCoy and went to work for him at his sheep outfit on diamond Mountain. McCoy said he liked the young man and was pleased with his work, but evidently herding sheep was not suitable to Lant, and he moved on. During his stay on Diamond Mountain, he did become somewhat familiar with the area and learned of Brown's Park and its isolated location. Lant left and soon got into trouble for stealing and ended up in the Utah State Pen. It was here that he met and become friends with the notorious Harry Tracy. McCoy mentioned what a fine specimen of a man Lant appeared to be. That he was of fine physical condition, and that he certainly was not the type to get mixed up with the likes of Harry Tracy.

After Tracy and Lant made their break from the Utah Penitentiary, they were looking for an out of the way and somewhat unknown place in which to hide. Lant being familiar with Diamond Mountain and vicinity, told Tracy of how he'd worked there for Walt McCoy, so they headed there. Arriving on Diamond Mountain a short time before the livestock men moved their herds to lower elevations; they made their way close to where McCoy's sheep were located. They had plans to go on into Brown's Park for the sanctuary it provided, but they had no grub and both were very hungry. Lant thought he could obtain food at McCoy's camp. As they neared the camp, they could see that McCoy was there, so Tracy told Lant to go in and get some food while he waited in some cover at a wash nearby. Lant well knew McCoy's reputation as a man not to trifle with or push around and also of McCoy's expert use of both rifle and hand gun. Remember now that Tracy was armed, but for the nature of a man he was he had no desire to meet or talk with McCoy, so he kept hid out of sight most likely with his gun in his hand.

Lant approached McCoy's camp and McCoy upon recognizing him invited him in. After listening to Lant's story, McCoy advised him to quit Tracy and come to Vernal and give himself up. But Lant was, according to McCoy, very much afraid of Tracy and feared for his life. In fact, he told McCoy that Tracy had told him that if he tried to run out on him, he'd trace him down and kill him. Lant firmly believed these threats and even shook when telling McCoy about it. He begged McCoy not to try to interfere or do anything that would upset Tracy for no telling what the consequences might be. Lant said they were heading for Brown's Park where they hoped to find work until things calmed down at which time they planned on leaving the country altogether. McCoy gave Lant some grub but continued to advise him to dump Tracy's company as soon as he could and get away. He offered to help him but Lant wouldn't listen as he feared for his life. He did though tell McCoy that he had learned his lesson and would not get involved with wrong doing again. To this McCoy said as Lant was leaving, as long as you're in the company of the likes of this man you're headed for trouble whether you think so are not. How true these words soon were proved to be.

Lant and Tracy went on into Brown's Park where they spent the winter. On March 1st, 1898 in the company of Pat Johnson, the killer of young Willie Strang a few days previously at the Hoy ranch, Tracy shot and killed Valentine Hoy as the posse closed in on them near Ladore Canyon.

McCoy related the incident on Diamond Mountain to authorities in Vernal who in turn notified officials at the Utah Pen, but nothing at the time was done about it. McCoy stated that if they had, perhaps Valentine Hoy's life would have been saved. Winter as a rule was hard across Southern Wyoming and doubly so over Diamond Mountain.

Walt McCoy was a man of honor and well respected by all who knew him. He knew many of the individuals who traveled the Outlaw Trail. This is just one of the many incidents he knew or was a part of.